

Ironically, we begin Advent by focusing on the end—the Second Coming of Jesus. In a couple weeks, we'll shift to his first coming as an infant. As Catholics, we don't tend to focus as much on that as some other Christians do, or try to guess the date, mostly because we believe our primary focus should be spent on trying to live as Jesus calls us to, in the here and now. But nonetheless, this season reminds us that there will an end of times, a Second Coming—the *Parousia*, as it's said in Greek, and as theologians refer to it.

So, are the end times something we should happily anticipate, or are they cause for fear? It depends on the person, much like at the end of the fall semester: those who have been keeping up with the assignments and coming to class are likely relieved by the semester's end, but those who don't, likely dread it.

And of his return, Jesus, in today's Gospel says, *Be watchful! Be alert!...you don't know when I'm going to return, so be ready.* A person might reasonably ask: *Why does God feel the need to surprise us?* It feels like walking through a darkened house, from room to room, knowing that from behind some corner or doorway, someone is going to jump out and surprise me. *Is he just trying to stress us out?*

To answer that, I'll remind you of a couple weeks ago, speaking about the Parable of the Ten Virgins, I mentioned that we have our lifetime to get our lives in order, to become who Jesus called us to be. Our bodily death ends that phase of the work. *So, what if we don't become who Jesus called us to be? Then what?* Well, if some part of our conflicted hearts truly desired for ourselves what he wanted for us, in purgatory we'll finish the work. On the other side of death, we'll do what we failed to on this side.

But today's Gospel, and the teaching about Jesus' Second Coming, tell us that some will not have reached the end of the natural course of earthly life, when he returns. For them, earthly life will be interrupted.

Whether we die before or are here when he returns, the principle is the same: we either do the work of converting our hearts here, or we'll have to do it later. That's worth hearing for the procrastinators among us—those who live by the motto, *"Why burden yourself today, with what you can put-off until tomorrow"*. And with the safety net of purgatory, we might think, *I'll just do the work later"*.

Here's why: It's because at death, or at Jesus' Second Coming—whichever comes first—we can then begin to live in what our hearts truly long for. C.S. Lewis once said, *"If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."* It's true. We are only pilgrims in this life, journeying toward our true home, the state of living for which our hearts were made.

Why would you want to delay going home?...like the comfort of being in your own bed, the smell of bacon in the morning air as you awake, your favorite slippers.... Again, failing to live as Jesus calls us to, and finishing the work in purgatory delays our homecoming. That's why we would want to do the work here and now. Let us be ready for it, and along with any spiritual laziness, let us stop deluding ourselves into believing that this world, this phase of life, is where our happiness lies.

In this Season of Advent, what do you need to work on, to become who Jesus is calling you to be? Probably for many of us, it's realizing that we don't really have a real prayer life, and that we need to make some changes to allow for it. Or maybe we realize that our relationship with our Lord is a little thin. Or it may be realizing that we need to be honest with ourselves that some of the things we do are harmful to our souls, and we need to work to break that habit. Whatever it is, have a plan, and give yourself some quiet to work on it. Let me know if you need help.

We don't know when Jesus will come back, whether it's after we die, or it interrupt our lives; whether it's today or later in our lifetimes—especially as we pray *"Thy kingdom come"*—let us not delay our journey home. Live like Jesus this life and this world, authentically and joyfully, but be ready to go home.